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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 002567

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP, NEA/I
BAGHDAD FOR AMB. NEUMANN

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SUBJECT: KUWAIT-IRAQ BORDER ACTIVITIES TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT

REF: KUWAIT 02548

Classified By: CDA Matthew Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: On August 11, Emboffs visited border-crossing points on the Kuwait-Iraq border to identify future construction sites for a planned Kuwaiti border barrier and to seek context for GOK reports of friction with Iraqi border patrols (reftel). Both Kuwait and Iraq appear determined to construct barriers or facilities only meters away from the UN-demarcated border, raising tensions and increasing the probability of armed confrontations on the border. End Summary.

2. (C) An Embassy group consisting of PolOffs, EconOff, and Office of Military Cooperation-Kuwait (OMC-K) personnel, including the Acting Chief of OMC-K, visited several Kuwait-Iraq border crossings on August 11, with the assistance of Kuwaiti border personnel, to better understand reports of problems. This border issue has quickly become a priority at the highest levels of the Kuwaiti MOD. The following is a clarification of issues reported in reftel and some new developments observed during Emboffs visit to three border crossings:

- The Kuwait survey teams (reftel) conducting a site survey for a vehicle barrier to run along the Kuwait-Iraq border plan to construct the barrier only two meters south of the UN-demarcated border.

- The Kuwaiti berm located nearest the border is approximately 50 meters south of the demarcated border. However, many Iraqis visually identify this berm as the actual border and mistakenly believe that they are still in Iraq, when in fact they have crossed into Kuwaiti territory.

- The Iraqis are constructing observation towers along the border approximately two to four meters north of the UN-demarcated border. The towers are painted light blue and white giving them a "UN" appearance.

- Iraqi border police vehicles are also painted in this same blue and white scheme.

- Although we cannot independently verify the accuracy of the reports, Kuwaiti border officials informed us that the Iraqi border patrol personnel are using Kuwait territory * an improved-surface dirt road, which runs along the border on the Kuwaiti side * to patrol the border. They also contend that Iraqi militias and smugglers hide behind the berm to facilitate drug smuggling and have used the physical barrier * 50 meters inside Kuwaiti territory * to fire on Kuwaiti patrols. Kuwaiti border officials told us that their intent is to remove the berm, because it obstructs their view of militia activities and smuggling, and replace it with the pipeline vehicle barrier.

- At the Marker #91 border crossing, linking Al-Abdeli and Safwan, there is an Iraqi border police building no more than one to two meters north of the physical border, if that.

- Kuwaiti Border Police suggested that the inclusion of an Iraqi engineer on the Kuwaiti survey team might assist in calming current tensions.

3. (C) Comment: The construction of the proposed Kuwaiti barrier almost directly on the demarcated border is sure to be read provocatively by the Iraqis. Conversely, the Iraqis are positioning structures within an equal proximity to the border, thus irritating Kuwaiti sensitivities. That the Kuwaitis have already reported threats by armed Iraqi border police makes the probability of future confrontations only greater if construction--so close to the border--continues without clear communication leading to a bilateral understanding between the two countries. A bilateral or multilateral discussion mechanism may be a way past the current situation.

4. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
TUELLER